

The
STORY OF
TWO
PRODIGALS

By
Jarrelle A. Aycock

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STORY OF TWO
PRODIGALS

A True Story

JH 4680

By Evangelist Jarrette E. Aycock

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The Nightingale of the Psalms
The Crimson Stream
The Grand Old Book
Win Them

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The Story of Two Prodigals

PART I

A BIBLE PRODIGAL

THIS is not a sermon, but a story of two young men, one ancient, the other modern. One lived at the time of Christ, the other in our own day, and though separated by nearly two thousand years of time, they had many things in common, and sin proved to be the downfall of both.

The first prodigal was a young man whose story we have from the lips of Jesus of Nazareth, published in the fifteenth chapter of the Gospel of Luke.

LUKE 15: 11-24

11 And he said, A certain man had two sons:

12 And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

13 And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

14 And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.

THE STORY OF TWO PRODIGALS

15 *And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.*

16 *And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.*

17 *And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!*

18 *I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,*

19 *And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.*

20 *And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.*

21 *And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.*

22 *But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:*

23 *And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:*

24 *For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.*

I have never looked upon this young man as being the type that many have pictured him, i. e., a lying, drinking, gambling boy disgracing his father and breaking the heart of his mother. His father was rich, and there was no law to force him to give away the half of his fortune, and any father who had sense enough to make a fortune would have known before he gave it, just what would become of it.

I believe in the beginning the prodigal was a worthy and an ambitious young man, that his prospects were bright and when he came to his father and asked for his portion, his father gave it to him with a proud heart feeling that he would properly handle it and make a name for himself in this new country where the future seemed so promising.

When his portion of his father's estate was given him, he bade a fond farewell to his parents and brother and took his journey into a far country, determined to make good at any cost, and come back to his father's house with a greater fortune and better name than when he left.

The far country.

We do not know how many miles this country was from his boyhood home, or how long it may have taken him to make the journey. Possibly only a few miles, and the journey was made quickly; and then it may have been many miles requiring weeks to get there. We do not know what bounded it on the north, south, east, or west; we only know that it was a *far* country. So far that no word ever came to cheer the father's and mother's heart,

and between them there was a great gulf over which no communication ever passed.

Some people have the idea that to be a prodigal, one must run away and spend many years from home, but that is not necessary. There are many prodigals today who were never a fortnight away from home, who have missed few meals at their father's table, yet they have taken this journey into the far country and between their souls and their parents there is a gulf fixed over which no communication ever passes.

The wrong crowd.

When the prodigal son reached his destination, his social nature craved companionship, and in seeking it he fell in with the wrong crowd. Oh, the young men who have been wrecked in just this way! When you run with a crowd you must keep up with it, and in doing so this boy wasted his substance in riotous living. All some people can see in this statement is the money he carried away from home, but that was the least of what he had.

When he left his home he was an ambitious young man, but he wasted his ambition in riotous living. He was honest, sober and chaste, but these good qualities were wasted. He was no doubt a strong young man physically and his physical strength went also. And last and not least, he had the half of a father's fortune, but it was wasted in riotous living.

In want.

No wonder when these things were wasted that "he began to be in want." When one loses those God given virtues or characteristics which go to make real man-

hood, he may possess the whole of a father's fortune and yet have a lack and a "want" in his soul that "no man" can supply.

Dropped by the crowd, which always occurs when one is down, he hires to a farmer to feed swine, and thus to meet his physical needs, but the wages were so small that "he would fain have filled himself with the husks that the swine did eat and no man gave unto him."

He comes to himself.

It must have been some Jewish feast day, or holiday that turned his thoughts back to his old home. There is no day in our time that will arouse and stir a young man's heart like Thanksgiving or Christmas. As he watched the swine eating their food, he thought, here I am the son of a good father, who has comfortable quarters and plenty of food for his servants, and this old farmer feeds his hogs better than he does me. I am perishing with hunger.

Going home.

I am going home, I will tell father I am sorry, that I am not asking him to take me back as a son, but to give me a job as a servant. Anything at home is better than what I get here. That was a good resolution, a good start, and many have gone that far and stopped, and it did them no good, but this young man did not stop with making resolutions. "He arose and came to his father."

The welcome.

"When he was yet a great way off his father saw him." He must have been watching for him. I know

our Heavenly Father is always watching for the home coming of his wandering children. When the old father recognized him he ran to meet him, embraced him and kissed him, and when the boy started to make his confession, the old father interrupted him by ordering the servants to bring the "best robe and put it on him, put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet, and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and be merry, for this my son was dead and is alive, he was lost and is found, and they began to be merry."

Such a welcome, and yet no greater than our Heavenly Father gives those who return to him. "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him *return* unto the Lord and he will have *mercy* upon him, and to our God and he will *abundantly* pardon."

Thus ends the story of the prodigal son, or our conception of it, as given in the New Testament.

PART II

A MODERN PRODIGAL

THE second prodigal is the story of a young man of our own day. This also is a true story. We do not know the name of the ancient Prodigal, the record does not say, but the name of the modern prodigal whose story we wish to give you, was Todd. This was a pet name his mother gave him when a child, and sometimes when she wished to speak to him in a more loving way, she called him Possum-Todd.

Todd was born on a farm in a Southern State. He was the youngest of eight children, and the one next to him was nine years his senior. There was nothing eventful in his child life to make him different from other children, and he was greatly loved by those brothers and sisters who were yet at home.

Todd's home, though poor and located seventy-five miles from the railroad, was, nevertheless, a Christian home—a place where prayer was wont to be made and where the family Bible held pre-eminence over the newspaper and the mail-order catalog. One of the first things Todd learned at his mother's knee was the story of Jesus, the babe born in a manger; the little boy who was lost; the young man from Nazareth who was so unappreciated and misunderstood; the wonderful life that he lived, the death that he died, his resurrection and ascension into heaven from whence he would some day return to gather those who had lived for him to be forever his own. These truths were so implanted in his boyish heart and mind, that skepticism was never able to uproot them.

When he was five years of age his father sold out the old homestead and moved west to the Indian Territory (now Oklahoma). The country was new, advantages few and the ways of men were wild and rough. It was on this trip, made in the old farm wagon pulled by two horses, that Todd saw his first train. After more than three weary weeks of travel (a trip which can now be made by auto in one day) the journey was ended and the family settled in a small two room log cabin. The country was mostly an open range, the farms were small and far between, the neighbors few and opportunities for schooling pitifully meager. He had but few toys but as soon as he was old enough he was given a horse and saddle, a dog and a gun. Small game was plentiful and he had a good time riding and hunting.

One day when Todd had ridden his pony, a two year old colt, down to the country store and post office a mile from his home, a man gave him a beautiful black dog. He was very proud of it, so he took one of his bridle reins, tied it around the dog's neck, and tied the other end of the rein to his saddle horn. He turned his pony loose for a moment and it started to walk away; the dog pulled back which frightened the pony and away it ran toward home dragging the dog. Todd followed as fast as he could. When the pony had run about half way home the rein broke releasing the dog but when Todd reached him he was dead. He hurried on home and found his pony safe, but his beautiful dog was gone.

When he was six years of age he started to school in a small one room log school house which bore the high

sounding name of "Red Mud," christened such because the cracks were daubed with red clay. An opening was sawed in either side of the building for windows with wooden shutters and leather hinges. The seats were made of the plainest boards and some were without backs. His first school book was the old blue back speller like the one his parents had used more than forty years before. School lasted only three months, each student paying one dollar per month for its support.

Todd's brothers and sisters were in many ways model young men and women, having no bad habits, never swearing, drinking or using tobacco in any way. They were always obedient to their parents, but Todd was different. Whether the difference was due to the fact that being the youngest he was indulged more than the others, will never be known. At any rate he seemed born with a wild and reckless nature, and while from his earliest recollection he was ambitious, and really wanted to make his mark in the world, this pull in the wrong direction throttled his ambitions and caused him to make a long, black, crooked mark instead.

His first bad habits.

At the age of nine he began to slip out with the boys during recess at school, to smoke cigarettes. Little did he dream when he started this habit that the time would come when it would sap his vitality, dwarf his mind, help to poison his tongue, ruin his dreams for the future, and become a staff on which his broken body would lean. He did not know that it would hinder him in health, hap-

piness and education, and that his body would one day so cry out for nicotine that he would spend his last penny for cigarettes and go hungry rather than deny the craving appetite. He did not know that it was the first in a series of steps that would push him from home, from school, and from friends and send him staggering helpless and friendless down the path of time.

Todd had one characteristic, which, had it been directed in the right channel would have been a blessing but which proved to be a curse. Whatever he did, he did with all his might. When he started a thing he would "go its length." He never said, "Go on," but "Come on." In forming habits this characteristic was manifested and it was not long after beginning to smoke cigarettes until he was chewing tobacco, smoking a pipe and using snuff. The time finally came in his life when he used seven and eight sacks of tobacco a week, smoking almost constantly. It was the last thing at night and the first thing in the morning. By the time he had reached his teens it had already begun to tell on his life.

Away to school.

When he was about fourteen years of age his mother began to take a religious paper, in which was carried each week an announcement of a religious school in another state. As the mother read and talked to him about the school Todd's ambitions to make something of himself were aroused and he began to beg his father to let him go away to school. His mother interceded for him and though his father was poor, with the assistance of one

of Todd's brothers, when the school opened in September Todd was there ready to enter and with a determination to make good at any cost.

It was against the rules of this school to use tobacco and having promised his mother he would quit smoking and obey the rules, before he reached his destination he threw away his cigarettes with no thought of ever taking them up again.

Naturally the first thing a young man would do in a strange place would be to look around for companionship, but instead of the Christian young men of that school coming forward and giving him a cordial reception and welcoming him into their ranks, they waited to see what kind of boy he was and where he would land;—a mistake too often made by Christian people, which has meant the ruination of souls. The worldly crowd, however, did differently. They met him smiling and with hearty hand shakes saying, "Come on, Todd, we'll show you a good time, and not let you get homesick." And being hungry for companionship, he accepted their advances and in a few days was established in their graces and counted "one of the bunch."

Breaking the rules.

Todd was only fourteen years of age and the three young men with whom he associated most were nearly twenty. When he was seen with these boys, he was not warned but classified. All went well for a time, but one afternoon as they strolled down the railroad right-of-way which ran through the little town, one of the young men

started to smoke. Todd was astonished and spoke to him about it, whereupon he said, "Oh, that's nothing, lots of them do it; you can get by. They will never catch you; take one." All these days he had been fighting the desire for a cigarette and now being assured that there was no danger he yielded and took his first step toward breaking the rules of the school and the promise he had made to his mother. It is never hard to take the second step and from that afternoon he became a rebel to the school government.

Bad habits can be acquired anywhere. No place in this world is immune from the devil's crowd. Sometimes parents send their children to Christian schools with the hope of reforming them. Often this happens, but how many times instead of being reformed the boys and girls are associated with other young people who teach them vices that drag them down.

When Todd entered that school he had never sworn an oath in his life, but while there he learned to scorch his lips with vile and awful oaths. Before leaving his home he had never seen a playing card, but one day stepping into the room of one of his friends he found them playing poker and making a place for him, they taught him the game. He had never been to a picture show, or a pool hall but they taught him to slip out nights and go to both. Getting a taste, he became bolder in transgressing the rules until finally after several reprimands by the faculty his three companions were expelled from school and he was given a large number of demerits, the faculty being lenient with him because of his age.

Leaving school.

Angered and ashamed, when the announcement of his friends' expulsion was made at chapel, he packed his grip and started for home. As he passed down the hall of the Administration building, the president of the school met him and said, "Todd, are you leaving us?" "Todd, what do you hope to ever make of yourself doing this way?" and he answered, "I don't know." "Well, good-by, Todd," said the president, "I'm sorry to see you leave this way; you can make a man of yourself if you want to."

Back home.

Todd returned home to a disappointed father and mother, and their disappointment was increased when they found that new and worse habits had fastened upon his life. He had passed during those few months from boyhood to young manhood, and now began to run with the young men of the community some of whom drank heavily. Being a boy whom most of them liked they would often give him whiskey and this too began to tell upon his life. He entered the public school at home, for Indian Territory had now become the State of Oklahoma and schools were better, but he did not get along with the teacher and soon gave that up. The months went by and most of his time was spent in association with those whose company was a menace rather than a blessing to him. This does not mean that all his friends were bad for they were not. He had boyhood chums who came from noble families and who were

model young men and had he chosen them, results would have been different; but he had a way of running with both crowds, and too often the rowdies were given the preference.

Every little while his old self, his real self, would rise up and cry out against these things and long to be a real man, and one summer evening as he sat with his parents out in the yard in front of the little log house, he said, "I see now where I missed it in the other school. I got in with the wrong crowd, and some of my friends here are of the wrong kind; I just can't make good in this environment, but if I could get into another school I would make good." Immediately their old hearts leaped with joy and confidence, and like all good parents they were ready to try anything if it would only help their boy make good, but when it was mentioned to the brother who had helped him to enter school before, he said, "No; he won't do right and I'll not help him any more." But another brother, nine years Todd's senior, was consulted and he said, "Yes, I'll help." So his father sold a horse and with the help of this brother, Todd was fitted out with new clothes, a nice trunk and with a hundred dollars in money he again started out.

In school again.

When he boarded the train and started away it was with the full intention of doing what was right, and as the train rolled across the new state now fast becoming dotted with farms and ranches Todd resolved to come back home with education, money and honor. He said,

"I'll show my brother who thinks I won't make good where he is wrong, and there will come a day when he will be proud of me; I will take my old parents out of the old log house and put them in a home where they will not have to work and my mother will not have to drag the heavy cotton sack down the row and go like a hired hand to the field of corn." That was a good resolution, but he made the mistake that thousands have made—he left God out.

When he entered the new school he found the same crowd he had known in the first one. Of course they had different names and different faces, but they represented the same forces—the powers of hell—and before he realized it, he had forgotten his resolutions and promises and was drifting from bad to worse. Here he spent much of his after-school-time in the pool hall, and in this way became acquainted with some of the toughs of the town. While he did not sell whiskey, he often accompanied them to the place where they kept it hidden; they liked him and often gave it to him to drink, and sometimes had him deliver it for them. More than once he made his way to his room staggering under the influence of strong drink. One morning, after such a night, when he entered the school for the opening exercises his name was called and he was publicly suspended, and asked to leave the building at once.

Angry and chagrined he walked out in disgrace and as soon as he could left town going to a school in another state. And it was about this time that the last

brother who had assisted him wrote home, saying, "I am through with him, I am convinced he will never amount to anything."

Back to the wall.

"This time," said he, "I'll show them." He arrived in town on Saturday, secured a place to board and room and being lonesome as he strolled down the street he entered a pool hall to pass the time. My dear young reader, let me urge you right here that if you are ever alone in a town or city, never go to the pool hall to find company for they are, generally speaking, patronized by the most shiftless "bunch" on earth.

Again he was with the wrong crowd and spent that first Saturday night and all day Sunday drinking and playing cards—just a boy in his teens, but drifting, drifting downward. Monday morning he entered school but his interest had been destroyed before he began. He had developed some skill at pool and there was a place where he could play without paying; therefore, he spent more time in the pool room than he did in the class room. Of course this could only bring trouble, his money was now gone and he was having to wash dishes in a restaurant for his board; his brothers had dropped him, his father could not write and his mother was the only one he ever heard from and she was broken hearted and this left him discouraged and fighting with his back to the wall. So when a chance opened for him to become night cook in the restaurant he gave up the fight, quit school, stopped writing home, and gave himself over to the current of the stream down which he was drifting.

On the road.

After working at his job for a few weeks and spending his money as fast as he made it in riotous living, he made his way one night down to the railroad to bum his way out of town. He had sold and expressed home all his belongings but the clothing he had on and with seven dollars in money, he waited at the water tank for a train to pass through.

"Stepped up to the brakeman
And put up a line of talk.
He said if you have the money, sir,
I'll take you to New York.
I have no money or ticket,
Pity me, I'm poor;
Get out of there! the brakeman said,
And locked the box car door.

"All around the water tank,
Waiting there for trains,
Tired and hungry I lay down,
Talk! 'twas all in vain.
Thinking of those good old days,
Wish I was home again,
But I'm a thousand miles from home,
Beating an old freight train."

About midnight a red-ball freight came through and stopped to take on water and he climbed aboard, little dreaming that this was just another spurt on a career of suffering and sin and that box cars would be his means of conveyance over many, many weary miles.

When he finally left this train it was in a city and a state where they had the open saloon. He had never seen one in his life, but passing the open door of one and seeing no one inside but the bartender, he entered, placed his dollar on the bar and called for his first glass of beer, and although the sign on the door said "no minors allowed," it was served without comment. That was the first time. Oh! that it had been the last time, but it was repeated again and again, until the day came when he would ask men for money to buy food and go spend it over the bar for beer. Had Todd's mother sung that evening as she so often did,

"Where is my wandering boy tonight,
The boy of my tenderest care,
The boy who was once my joy and life,
The child of my love and prayer."

the answer would have been,

"Down, down, down, down,
Down in the licensed saloon."

He did not write home now, and it was a long time before his mother or any of his people ever saw him or heard from him again. There were times when he had a good job and the work was easy, and there were other times when he swung the pick and shovel and worked at the hardest manual labor. There were times when he could enter a restaurant and order a square meal; at other times he would make his way to the back door of

some humble home and ask for bread to keep soul and body together. There were times when he had a good room in a hotel, and times when he spread newspapers on the floor of some box car and shivered in the cold throughout the night. When he traveled he sometimes bought a ticket and rode the cushions, but more often he was broke and beat his way, riding the "blind baggage," the "side-door pullman," or almost any place on the train where he could hide from the crew. During all these months he did not stay long in any one town, but drifted from place to place, like the prodigal son "wasting his substance in riotous living." On one occasion he passed within less than a mile of his sister's home but did not go to see her or let her know he was near, although he had not seen her for years.

Christmas.

It was Christmas evening; the snow lay some twelve or fourteen inches deep when the freight train on which Todd was riding rolled into a western town where he got off, tired, cold and hungry. He had lost his coat, his shoes were almost gone, and he had not eaten anything for more than a day.

He had no money and no one seemed kind or thoughtful enough to give him any. He had stopped at the bakery and stood with his cold, pinched face against the window looking at the good things on the inside, but they were not for him. He had watched other young men enter the restaurants and as the door would open the fragrance of wholesome food would be wafted to him,

making him hungrier than ever. As he walked shivering down the street he passed home after home and could see the families gathered around the tables which were bountifully spread, partaking of their Christmas supper. He stopped at three of these homes and knocked upon the back door, only to be greeted by stony stares and when he asked for food the doors were shut in his face.

When he was turned down the third time, he said, "I'll have something to eat if I have to go to every house in town." By this time he was near the end of the street where stood a small, three room house. He knocked at what he thought was the kitchen door, but when the door was opened by an old man, he saw that it was the dining room. Todd told his story and the old man, took him by the hand, saying, "Come in; supper will be ready in a few minutes." He stepped into the room and saw the table all set for the Christmas meal; the turkey, the cranberry sauce, the pumpkin pie and all that goes with a Christmas supper. He glanced into the front room and saw a number of young people talking and having a good time. The old man said, "Sit down son, we'll have supper right away." "No," said Todd, "I'm not fit to eat at your table; just give me a sandwich and I'll be thankful." "Then, if you won't eat at the table with us," said the old man, "you shall eat at the first table." And he placed a chair for him, filled his plate with good things, then said, "Mother, bring this young man a cup of coffee." When he said that, the boy looked in the kitchen and saw an old woman bending over a wood stove with an old fashioned coffee pot in her hand. A blur came be-

fore his eyes and a lump in his throat; his appetite was gone, for he saw in his imagination hundreds of miles away another home, another table set with the Christmas supper, and another old fashioned woman, his mother, going about serving the meal; and he saw a chair he might have been occupying had not sin ruled his life. His very soul cried out with the prodigal son, "My father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare and I perish with hunger." He hastily ate a few bites of the food and arose to leave. As he passed out the door, the old man shook hands with him and with a "God bless you, son," left a coin in his hand. Todd hastened down to the depot; a passenger train had just pulled in and he climbed on the "blind baggage" and rode out of town, anxious to put as much distance between him and a place that made him think of home and mother as he possibly could.

"She's a little old fashioned, that sweet mother of mine.
There are many whose beauty will my mother's outshine;
She's a little old fashioned, as I plainly can see,
But she is the dearest, sweetest mother to me.

"She's a little old fashioned, that sweet mother of mine,"
Though even her plainness now my heart strings entwine;
Other hands may be whiter, but none other so dear,
For they smoothed my pillow for many a year.

"She has gone home to glory, that sweet mother of mine,
To the land of the angels, where the sun always shines;
And some day I shall join her, in that home of the free,
And she'll be in heaven, sweetest mother to me."

The blizzard.

Todd and his pal had shipped out of a western city to a job back in the mountains. It took them all day to reach the place of work after they arrived at the nearest station. They only worked one day when his buddy was fired, so Todd quit and together they started to walk the weary miles back into town, there was only one house on the road, a place called the half way house, where freighters spent the night, for it took a loaded wagon two days to make the trip. They left the camp at noon, and before dark a blizzard came up, fine snow began to fall, which stung their faces like nettles, and was so blinding that they could not see their way, and could only tell they were in the road by feeling the worn track made by the constant travel of horses. Hour after hour they struggled, cold and tired, yet afraid to stop for fear of freezing to death. Late at night they reached the half way house, but having no money the proprietor would not let them stay in the house, but told them they could sleep in the barn, which was an open building and the wind and snow came blowing through the cracks and they knew if they stayed there they would be frozen to death. A shack stood in the yard and in this the freighters made their beds and spent the night. It had a dirt floor but was equipped with a stove, and was a protection from the wind and snow, so making their way to this shack they told the freighters their plight, and two of them offered to share their blankets, so the boys crawled in with them, and their lives were saved. The next morning the freighters gave the boys breakfast and let them ride into town.

A kind operator.

One day Todd had been put off the train miles from a town or station. He walked for hours; he was hungry and every bone in his body ached. He came shortly after nightfall to a small station located high up in the Rocky Mountains, far removed from any town. Just as he entered the little waiting room an old tramp also entered and started to lie down upon a seat. The operator came to the window, and cursing the tramp made him get out. Then turning to Todd he said, "Lad, you look cold and tired; come into the office where it is warm." When he entered the office he was told to climb upon a table where he could lie down. The operator then took a big, forty-five caliber revolver out of his overcoat pocket. When Todd saw this he was frightened, but there was no danger, for laying the revolver down on his desk he spread the big coat over Todd who slept snugly and warm throughout the night. When he awoke the sun was shining and thanking the operator for his night of rest, he went on his way.

New Year

It was the last night of the old year and bitter cold when Todd, riding on the top of a passenger train rolled into a city of the middle west. He climbed down as soon as the train stopped and seeing a policeman coming toward him, darted through the crowd and ran down the street. As soon as he was safe he began to look for a place to spend the night. He entered a depot only to have a policeman order him out. It was nearing eleven o'clock

and the wind was blowing a gale from the north, the streets were thronged with a merry crowd out to watch the passing of the old year and the coming of the new. But there was no gladness in Todd's heart. He was broke, cold and hungry and he knew if he did not find a place to sleep he would freeze. He had no money; in fact the only thing he had left was a stick pin which had been a gift and which he had tried to keep, but now he had to choose between the pin and his life. Making his way into a cheap hotel he gave it to the proprietor in exchange for permission to sleep on a cot. He went to sleep a little before midnight and awoke on New Year's morning to find that during the night he had been paralyzed, that his face was all twisted out of shape, that many words he was unable to speak, that eating and drinking had become difficult and his entire left side felt as if it were asleep. Making his way down the street he met a man who asked him for enough money to buy his breakfast, and when Todd told the man that he too was broke and had had no breakfast, the man handed him a half dollar and said, "Go on kid and get you something to eat, and I'll get it back out of the next fellow." After getting something to eat, he started out of the city, partially paralyzed in body and with a heart that was almost paralyzed with fear as to what might be the outcome of his condition.

A real mother.

One night he came into a town and made his way to what had the appearance of an humble home to ask

for something to eat. There came in answer to his knock a motherly looking old lady, and when told that he was away from home and out of work she said, "Come in, young man, supper will be ready in a few minutes. Daughter and I live here alone, but I have two boys somewhere in the world tonight and I would be mighty thankful if some one would be kind to them." When they sat down to the table the old mother bowed her head and prayed, "Lord bless this young man and save him from sin. He probably has a mother tonight who is praying for him; and bless my own two boys who may be alone and hungry and may some mother be kind to them." When she had prayed she began to pass him things to eat, but her prayer had spoiled his supper and he was anxious to get away as soon as possible. When he started to go she said, "I have no place for you to sleep, but you can eat here until you get a job and are able to pay." He thanked her and hurried away, anxious to leave town and put distance between him and those things that reminded him of mother, God and home.

"Can a boy forget his mother's prayer,
Although he's wandered, God knows where?
No! down the path of sin and shame,
A mother's prayers are just the same.
Come back my boy, come back I say,
And travel in your mother's way."

Todd in many ways was not a bad boy; he was not criminal, but just like thousands of mothers' boys today, bound by habits, broken in spirit and will power, he was

staggering along the shores of time where the alligators of crime were likely to drag him down at any moment; and it is a miracle indeed that he kept free from those things. He often met vicious criminal characters and because of his youth they talked freely before him. At one time such a man tried very hard to get him to take dope and it must have been the mercy of God that held him back, for one taste would have no doubt meant his ruin forever.

Thinking back.

It was Sunday in midwinter. Todd had secured a job on a cattle ranch. He had been there but one week and had been given the use of a nice horse and saddle. He had ridden with one of the hands to a dance the night before but his clothing was such and his face was so twisted and drawn that he would not go in. It had been a long time since he had seen any of the social side of life and the following morning, Sunday, he began to think of the old home miles away, and with those thoughts came the desire to go back; at least close enough to see and find out how things were going. Without telling his employer or asking for his week's wages he walked off the place and with not a cent in his pocket he started to beat his way the long, weary journey home.

The river road.

It was a dark winter night when the freight train on which Todd was riding rolled into the little town six miles from his home. The brakeman had put him off six times during the last thirty miles, but the pull for

home was so strong that each time he caught it again and finally arrived. He did not tarry in the little town but started immediately on his six mile hike out over the old river road. As he walked through the darkness with the river rolling along on his left hand and the high bluff towering on his right, he began for the first time to really take an inventory of his condition. When he left his home he was well dressed, but as he shivered in his shabby and worn clothing he knew that like the prodigal he had wasted all in riotous living. When he left home he had money, but now dig as deeply as he might in his pockets, not a penny could he find. When he left home he was strong physically, but as he felt of his pale, pinched and twisted features and coughed the awful hacking cigarette cough that seemed to tear his lungs, he knew his physical strength was gone. Young men, you cannot play with sin and come out of it physically or mentally what you were when you went in. When he went away he had plans, hopes, and ambitions, but all had been shattered.

"I can never meet mother like this," he said, "I must have some story to tell her." The devil is always ready with a suggestion to put one deeper in trouble. Todd had a scar on his side that his folks did not know of so the devil suggested that he tell them he had been through an operation, was too proud to write for money and therefore beat his way in, showing the scar for evidence. It seemed a plausible story so he planned to make that his alibi.

He had covered more than half the journey when he heard voices and the sound of horses' hoofs on the road ahead. He crawled out in the bushes and hid until they passed. He knew the riders, for they were neighbor boys, and he also knew the horses, which brought again the memory of his own good horse and saddle that had been wasted in riotous living. When the riders were gone he walked on up the road until he came to where the highway turned sharply to the right and on ahead lay the old road that led through the trees down across the ravine and up the hill to his home, a quarter of a mile away.

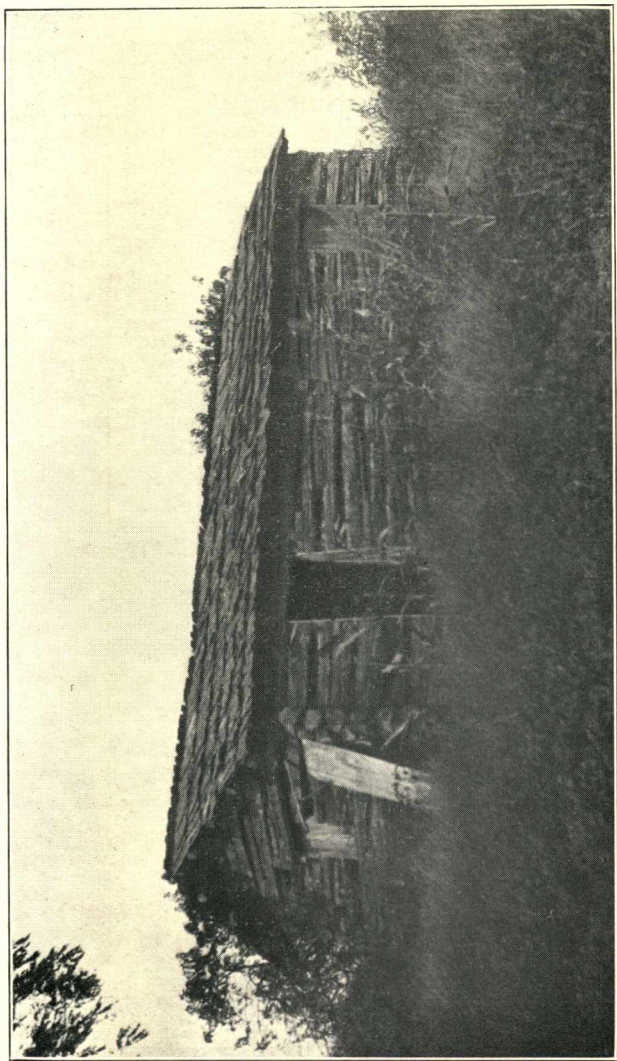
A boy and his dog.

Todd had a dog at home, a big black fellow, a spaniel who was considered quite vicious and inclined to bite strangers at night. As the boy walked through the leaves that had fallen in the road, the old dog heard him and came charging toward him. Todd knew his viciousness, and wondered just what he should do. When the dog was several yards away, Todd spoke his name and immediately the big fellow stopped. He spoke to him again and with a joyous bark the old dog bounded to meet him. He would jump up and try to lick his face, then circle around him and run toward the house and back to meet him again. He did not see the pale, twisted features and ragged clothing; he only saw the boy who had played with him in his puppy days and who had scampered with him over the hills after the rabbit and the squirrel, and in his dog fashion, welcomed him back home.



TODD'S DOG

*"My dog, he ain't like some folks,
For all the things I like to do,
My dog, he likes to do 'em too,
Like hidin' from the injuns in the woods
Or huntin' frogs,
Or chasin' rabbits underneath ol' logs,
Folks is all right, but they don't understand
A fellow like his dog."*



TODD'S OLD HOME

*I am thinking today of a little old home,
Way back in the hills where my feet used to roam,
How happy was I in my prattle and glee,
That little old hut was a mansion to me.*

To most people there would be nothing touching in such actions from a dumb brute but to Todd, who had gone for months without hearing a kind word, or seeing a friend, who had gone for three weeks without sleeping in a bed, and for many hours without food, the welcome of a dog meant much and he put his arm around the old fellow and wept on his neck. Then he told him to be quiet, for on the hill just ahead he could see the outline of the little two room log house, "Home." There he must meet father and mother and give to them a reason for his condition and with the story he had made up firmly fixed in his mind, he walked up the road to the house.

Home Again

It was late at night when Todd opened the gate and passed up the little stone walk. A light was shining under the door and he knew his parents had not yet retired. He knew that inside by the old fashioned fireplace sat an old man and woman, his father and mother. It was not a fine room elaborately furnished which he was about to enter; just a sixteen by eighteen foot room, ceiled overhead with canvas and around the sides with building paper. In one corner to the right of the fireplace stood a small stand table. In the other, to the left, was a cabinet machine on which was the old family Bible and a two burner oil lamp. Each of the other corners contained a full sized bed. He knew that on the right hand side of the fireplace sat his father in a straight backed chair with hickory bark seat; that over near the lamp his mother would be sitting in an old, homemade

rocker, made of hickory withes. No, it was not fine, but it was Todd's home and he longed, yet hesitated and feared to enter.

Steeling himself as best he could to face the ordeal, he knocked upon the door, and what do you suppose he heard? He had other brothers who were away from home. In fact, no one lived at home now but father and mother. Todd had not been home for a long time and they had not heard from him in months; they did not know whether he was dead or alive, but when he knocked he heard his mother say, "I wonder if that is Todd come home?" His old father opened the door and when he saw the boy, he had so changed that he scarcely recognized him and he said, "Is that you, son?" Todd answered, "Yes, sir." When they heard that, the old mother did not push him away and say, "Where is the money we gave you? What about the promises you made us? Why are you coming home in this condition?" But with a cry of "Thank God it is my baby boy," she ran across the room, threw her arms about his neck, pulled his head down on her shoulder and pressed kiss after kiss upon his pale, drawn face. She did not see his ragged clothing, nor his twisted features, but glimpsing back into the past she saw the baby boy for whom she had gone into the valley of the shadow of death to give life and she welcomed him back home. His old father with tears in his eyes, gripped his hand and patted his shoulder in a way that spoke louder than words.

The old kitchen.

It was late when Todd arrived, but mother went immediately to the kitchen and built a fire in the old wood stove and cooked him the first warm meal he had eaten in a long time. The kitchen was just a large log room with one small window, and with a door leading out into the yard. An old fashioned safe stood in the corner, the kind that was made of tin with small air holes like nail holes, and in the center of the room stood a long home made table, for the room served for both dining room and kitchen and when company came large pallets were made on the floor and it became a bedroom also. There is no place about the home that so grips the heart of a boy as the kitchen and especially a boy like Todd, for his mother's kitchen was free, the key that was made to lock the safe had been thrown away, and only a wooden button stood between her children and the things she had to eat.

"Far back in my musings, my thoughts have been cast,
To the cot where the hours of my childhood were passed.
I loved all its rooms to the pantry and hall
But that blessed old kitchen was dearer than all.
Its chairs and its table, none plainer could be,
But all its surroundings were sacred to me;
From the nail in the ceiling to the latch on the door,
I loved every knot in that old kitchen floor.

"But the dearest of memories I've laid up in store,
Is the mother that trod that old kitchen floor
Day in and day out from morning till night,
Her footsteps were busy, her heart always light;

And it seemed to me then, that she knew not a care,
The smile was so gentle, her face used to wear,
I remember with pleasure what joy filled our eyes,
When she told us the stories that children so prize.
They were new every night, though we'd heard them before
From her place in her chair on the old kitchen floor."

Looking for trouble.

When he had finished his supper they went back into the front room and Todd kept listening for the harsh words that he felt sure would come concerning his condition, but they were never spoken. But every little while his mother, as she talked about things in general would look at his pinched, twisted face and then taking the corner of her old gingham apron would wipe the tears from her eyes, but not once did she ask him where, or why. Ah! she knew and father knew; they did not need to ask; it was sin that bound their child. And the old father ran his hand in his pocket and pulled out the money for which he had worked so hard, and handing it to him said, "Son, go down town in the morning and get a new suit and what other clothes you need."

The pig in the parlor.

You can't change a pig by putting it in the parlor; try it and see which changes the quickest. Todd took the money and bought the clothes, but he lined up with some of the Godless crowd in the community and became more wild than ever. It takes more than kind treatment and environment to change a person. He drifted deeper in sin, growing more wild and reckless, and drinking at

every opportunity. Never will he forget the night he entered his home and that precious old mother who came to meet him at the door staggered back saying, "My God! my boy is drunk."

During all this time of recklessness and seeming indifference, he was fighting a battle in his heart; and ever and anon something would rise up and want him to break away from the things that damned, a something that wanted him to do right. No doubt it was God speaking to his heart.

Nearly killed.

One day when Todd was drinking he went down to a depot in a town near his home to buy a ticket to the next town. They told him the train had just gone. A red ball freight was passing through, running fast, and Todd tried to catch it; only a crazy or half drunk person would ever have attempted it. When he caught the rod his feet slipped and he was dragged some distance along the track, then miraculously rolled out of the way of the wheels escaping unhurt. Those who saw the incident said they would not have given a feather for his life, yet God spared him, and spoke to him that day as he walked back up town saying, "If that had been fatal, where would your soul be?"

Not long after that one night at the close of a dance, he would have been killed had not a friend intervened and when he realized the next day how near eternity he had been, God again seemed to say, "Where would your soul be now?" But flinging these suggestions aside he drifted on in sin.

A sister comes home.

One morning as Todd stood leaning on the front gate, smoking a cigarette, a sister who lived in another state and whom he had not seen for some years, came walking up the road. She had come home unexpectedly that morning and getting off the train at a small station two miles from home, had walked. When she saw him she began clapping her hands, saying, "Well, well; if it isn't my baby brother," and when she kissed him said, "Todd, God is going to save you and make a preacher out of you." He laughed and replied, "If He is, He hasn't mentioned it to me." But she answered, "You can laugh if you want to, but I have been praying for you and God gave me the assurance that he would save you and make a preacher of you." And nothing that he could say seemed to shake her faith.

Todd was very hard those days and would not stay in the house when the family had prayers, and sometimes when they started to pray he would pick up a French harp and going out in the yard would play a jazz or rag-time tune to show his indifference to the things of God. This would cause his mother to weep and say, "I just almost lose hope some times," but his sister would say, "Mother, don't you worry, Todd is going to be saved; I know he is." And from this hope she seemed never to waver.

Keeping a promise.

Todd saddled his horse one morning and was just starting to ride away when his father called to him. He rode up to the gate and his father put his hand on his

knee saying, "Son, cigarettes are killing you; you cough all night long, and the way you are living is breaking your mother's heart," and as the tears ran down his face he continued, "It hurts me also, and I want you to promise me that for mother's sake and mine, you will quit and live differently." Todd leaned over in his saddle and giving him his hand said, "Father, I will try, I'll do my best, and if I can't quit I will come and tell you," and rode away. For two days he fought the appetite in his life and the hell in his heart and then he rode back home and going up to his father he said, "Father, I can't do it." He wanted to, but sin had so wrapped its slimy folds about his young life he was unable in his own strength to break them.

A song in the night.

One night Todd was out with a group of fellows fishing. About ten o'clock it became chilly and they built a fire and sat around warming and telling yarns. A short distance up the creek was a farm house and while they were talking, a lady came out on the porch and began to sing. The boys stopped talking to listen and this is what they heard floating on the night air.

"Do you see the signal, brother, of the Royal Gospel Train,
Warning you now to be ready, and your ticket to obtain,
Should you let it pass your station you will then be found
too late,
You will plead and cry for mercy, when you see your awful
fate.

'Tis the only train that's running on the standard schedule
time,

It is going straight to heaven on the Royal Gospel line.

It will make complete connections, nothing will this train de-
lay,

Gospel coaches travel only on this straight and narrow way."

How it affected the others that night we do not know,
but the song sank deeply in Todd's heart and he never
got away from it. For years in his more thoughtful mo-
ments, the words of the song would come back,

"Should you let it pass your station, you will then be found too
late,

You will plead and cry for mercy, when you see your awful
fate."

The woman never knew the outcome of her song in
the night, but God in his divine providence, was using it
to reach the heart of a wayward boy and bring him back
from sin.

"I shot an arrow into the air,
It fell to earth, I knew not where.
I breathed a song into the air,
It fell to earth, I knew not where.
Long, long afterward in an oak,
I found the arrow still unbroke,
And the song from beginning to end,
I found again in the heart of a friend."

The elder brother.

A brother twenty-five years his senior who had been away from home during most of Todd's lifetime came for a visit, and hearing of the recklessness of the younger brother said, "I believe I can handle him." One day he asked him to go for a walk and when they were well away from the house he said, "Now, Todd, I want to help you, and if you will promise me that you will quit cigarettes, never drink and never swear, I will do something for you." When he had finished the boy said, "I will not promise anything." "Why?" "Because I have promised my other brothers, and I have made promises to my father and mother which I did not keep, and I am not going to make any more, and I will not promise you that I will ever try to do any different." When he said that, the big brother turned in seeming disgust and walked back to the house leaving him alone. Todd did not take that attitude because he was all bad, or wanted to be bad, but because he did not want to add any more broken promises to those already against him.

Leaving home.

A few days after this talk he said to his mother, "I am going away," and he mentioned a city some two thousand miles distant. His mother began crying and said, "Son, please don't go; every time you leave home you come back in a worse condition. If you were a Christian I would not mind it, but I am afraid if you leave again you will never be saved." But he had made up his mind and her pleadings could not stop him. Next day when he started to leave she placed her arms about

his neck and said, "Son, promise me you won't drink." He answered, "Mother, I won't." Todd meant that, but he did not keep it. In less than two hours he had fallen in with a crowd who drank, and his will power failed him.

When he arrived at his destination he secured a position in an office and was drawing a very good salary, but it was a saloon town and Todd could not stay out of the saloon. More than once he came into the office, his breath polluted with whiskey and he knew that his time was short, that he would soon lose his job. Each day he grew more and more restless, and for no particular reason he became bitter toward his brothers and every one who meant anything to him.

The end of the trail.

It was Monday night, and Todd with a cigarette in his lips walked slowly down one of the worst streets in the city. He was bitter that night; bitter against his brothers, bitter against his parents, bitter against God and bitter against life. He had no reason to be; his parents had idolized him, his brothers had been good to him, God had spared his life and protected him again and again, and life had not misused him, he had misused life.

He made up his mind that he was through. He would give up his job leave that part of the country and never write home again. "I'll not live long at the pace I'm going," he mused, "and when I'm gone, they'll be better off and I don't suppose they'll care."

As he walked along he heard singing and noticed some people in a little mission hall were holding a service. The

door was open and as he stopped on the side walk to listen, a man standing on the curb placed his hand on his shoulder and said, "Go in, lad, you might hear something that would do you good." On the window he noticed these words, "There is hope for all who enter here."

The mission was an old store building with a saloon on either side of it. When Todd sat down he looked around and saw mottoes and verses of scripture on the walls. One said, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." Another said, "Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as snow, and though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool." Under the clock were the words, "Now is the accepted time," and a large sign over the platform stretching the entire width of the building read, "How long since you wrote to mother?"

The building was well filled that night. Perhaps two hundred people were present, mostly men, and such a crowd as they were! Some were dead drunk, some just drunk enough to be noisy and others not drunk but dirty, ragged and hungry. Todd was well dressed that night, but as he looked about something seemed to say, "You've been like that and some day you cannot be any other way."

The testimony meeting.

After the message they had testimonies. One man after another arose to his feet and told his story. There were young men who seemed to have lived just as he had. They told how they had been bound by habits, how they had beat their way around the country; hungry and cold,

unable to hold a job, and how their mothers were heart broken over their lives and their brothers and friends had no confidence in them, and they would climax their testimony by saying, "We came in here one night and found Jesus, and he took away the old desires and made new men out of us. We don't want the old things any more, we have a good job, mother isn't worrying about us, we have regained our old friends and have made many new ones, and best of all, we have Jesus." Todd had heard lots of preaching but he had never heard religion brought down to the practical, every day life as these men did in their testimonies.

The invitation.

When the testimony service was over a young man got up and said, "Fellows we have a game here that you can't beat," and he began to tell what Christ had done for him, and it seemed to Todd that he was telling the story of his own life and when he had finished he said, "Men, this salvation has been working for over ten years and I wonder if there is a man in the house that would like to take a chance on it; if so, put up your hand," and Todd shot up his hand. "If you mean business," said the young man, "stand to your feet," and he arose to his feet. "Now," said the man giving the invitation, "if you really want to get rid of sin, come and kneel at this altar," and with a number of others Todd went forward. We don't know what became of the others, but when Todd knelt a man beside him said, "Young man, if you want to be saved, you must pray," and when Todd told him he couldn't pray, he said, "Say God be merciful

to me a sinner and save me now from all my sins for Jesus' sake." And he repeated it over. He urged him to pray it again, and when he had repeated it two or three times he quoted him God's promises, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out"; "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved"; "If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Then he said, "Young man, if you have really come with all your heart tonight and asked Him to save you, what does he do for you?" And Todd answered, "If he does what he says He will, he saves me now," and arose to his feet with the consciousness that his sins had been blotted out. Some cigars were protruding from his breast pocket and the man said, "Do you want these any more?" He answered, "No, sir," and he never touched them again. Oaths, whiskey, cards, cigarettes and evil habits had gone out of his life forever.

Will he stick?

Todd did not regain at once the confidence of his friends and loved ones. Some thought his profession was only a camouflage, his brothers said he would not make good. When his mother heard the news she said, "I am afraid son will not hold out." When the people in the mission sized him up, some said, "That young man is not here for any good, he will never stick," but almost a score of years have rolled by since that wonderful night, and Todd is still sticking, by the grace of God.

Back to school.

Some time after Todd's conversion he entered a school in a nearby town to prepare himself for the call which God had given him to the ministry. He was surprised when making application for admission to find that the president was the same man who filled that office in the first school he had attended, and who had said, "You can be a man if you want to." When he entered the room and the president recognized him he said, "Well, well, if it is not my old friend, Todd, what can I do for you?" Todd said, "Doctor, I have come to see about entering school." The president remembering the old days, hesitated for a moment, then said, "Todd, what do you want to go to school for?" When he replied, "To study for the ministry," the good president sprang to his feet and giving him a glad hand said, "Well, we are delighted to have you then."

Two years after his conversion God gave him man's greatest temporal blessing, a good wife, a true Christian helpmeet.

Enters evangelistic work.

Three years after he was saved, Todd entered the evangelistic field. This step into the work of the Lord was not an easy one, for he had only one meeting to start with, and there was no one to boost for him, and for three years he served what might be called an apprenticeship, getting no calls from churches, yet keeping everlastingly at it, preaching in school houses, in old store buildings, blacksmith shops, under brush arbors, tents and some

times out under the stars with only the trees for shelter. His pay was small, at one time receiving only forty cents for a ten day meeting and often getting less than ten dollars. It seemed he would never get before the people, but refusing to be discouraged he preached on until at the end of about three years, the struggle stopped instantly. He had just closed a ten day meeting in a school house for which he received twenty-five dollars, and the very next day a call came from a good church. This was immediately followed by another, and another until they finally came from all the states but four and others came from most of the provinces of Canada.

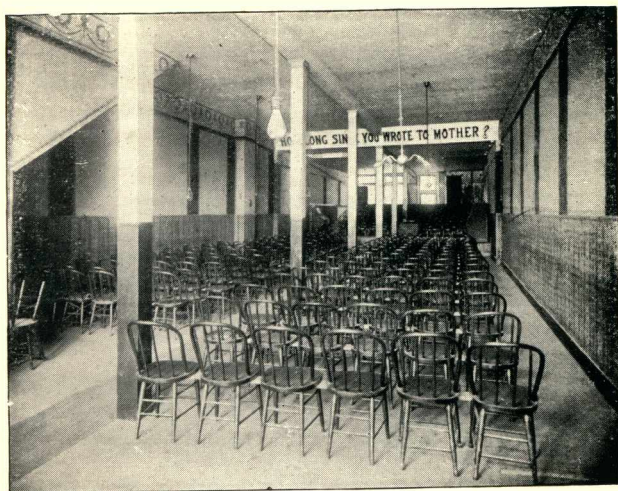
In these evangelistic tours, he was able to go back to the old dance hall and for three weeks preach Christ where he was wont to dance. He went into the old pool hall where he had idled so many, many hours away and kneeling down gave thanks to God for deliverance. He made his way to the hotel where he was paralyzed and thanked God for a face straightened and a character reformed. He walked down to the old water tank where he had caught his first freight, and there bowed his head in gratitude to God that he was now a passenger on the train for heaven.

Todd's father and mother lived for some fifteen years after he was redeemed, but they did not worry about him any more, and when he would drop in between meetings, they would have delightful times around the family altar together. His sisters who had prayed for him so often saw their prayers fully answered, and his brothers regained their lost confidence in him. This story of Todd is

written that those who have wayward brothers, that those parents who have erring children, may take courage and hold on to God, and mothers' boys who have gone astray may know that there is hope for them, for the Christ who saved Todd is "the same yesterday, today and forever."

"When I was but a little child,
How well I recollect,
How I would grieve my mother
With my folly and neglect,
And now that she has gone to heaven
I miss her tender care,
Oh! Savior, tell my mother,
I'll be there.
Tell mother, I'll be there,
In answer to her prayer,
This message, blessed Savior
To her bear,
Tell mother I'll be there,
Heaven's joys with her to share,
Oh, Savior, tell my mother I'll be there."

(The end.)



WHERE TODD WAS SAVED

*"There is a spot to me more dear,
Than native vale or mountain,
A spot for which affection's tear,
Springs grateful from its fountain.
'Tis not where kindred souls abound,
Though that is almost heaven,
But where I first my Saviour found,
And felt my sins forgiven."*